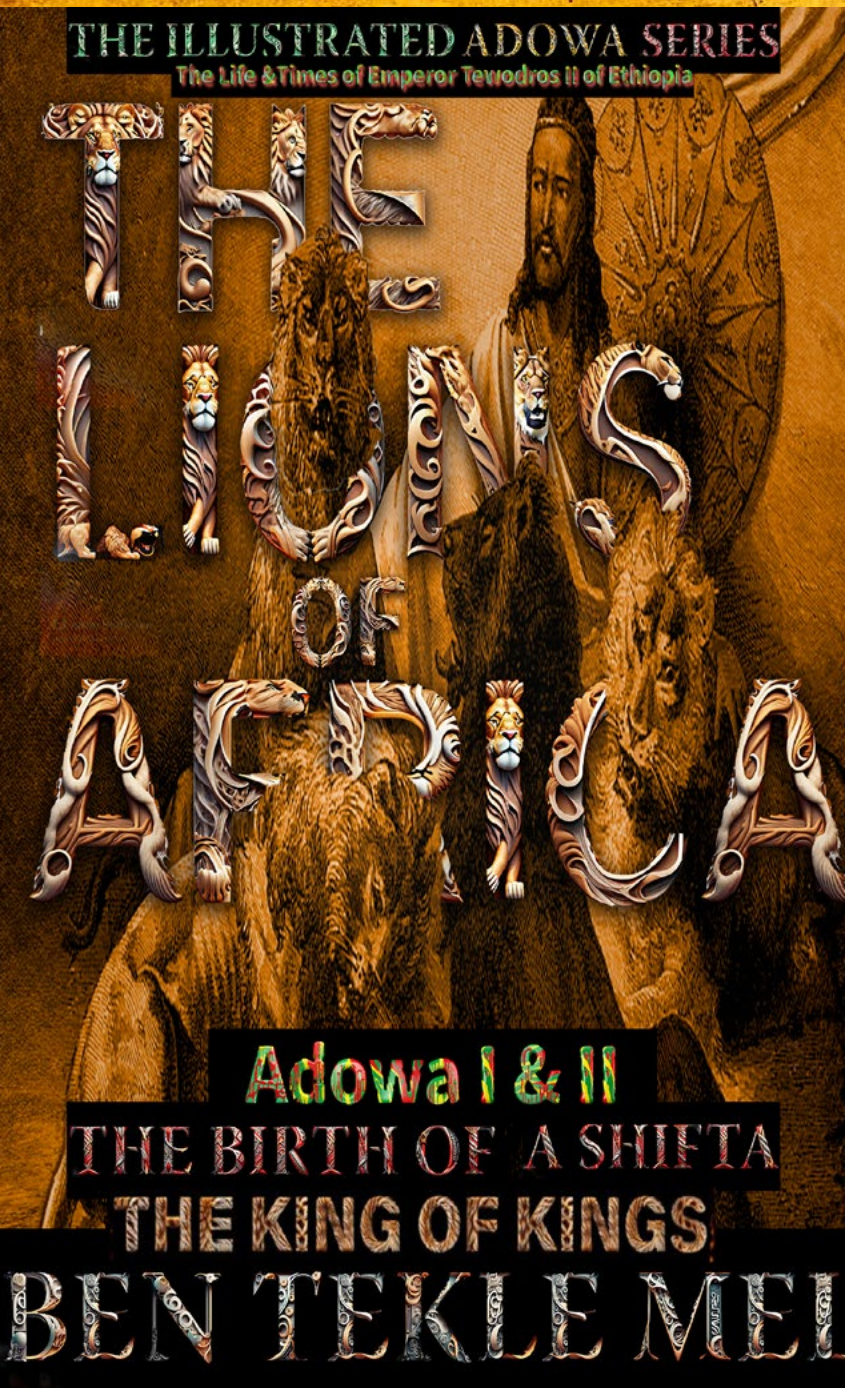


THE ILLUSTRATED ADOWA SERIES

The Life & Times of Emperor Tewodros II of Ethiopia



THE
LION
OF
AFRICA

Adowa I & II

THE BIRTH OF A SHIFTA

THE KING OF KINGS

BEN TEKLE MEL

ADOWA



THE LIONS OF AFRICA

THE ILLUSTRATED ADOWA SERIES

ADOWA ONE AND TWO

THE BIRTH OF A SHIFTA & THE KING OF KINGS

BY
BEN TEKLE MEL

BLM PRODUCTIONS

**The Lions of Africa:
Illustrated Adowa Series:
Adowa I&II: The Birth of a Shifta/The
King of Kings**

Ben Tekle Mel

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Dedicated to

My Nephews and Nieces

and

The coming generations of Africa.

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NOTE TO THE READER

On the first day of March, in the year 1896, the deafening echo of gunfire resounded through the mountains of Adowa as Emperor Menelik's troops, hundreds upon thousands of African warriors, charged forward in a final surge, determined to decimate the European invaders. After centuries of turmoil and resistance, this singular battle will decide whether a small nation at the horn of Africa, Ethiopia, maintains its independence or succumbs to colonial conquest. This pivotal clash will determine if the false ideologies of colonialism and fascism triumph on the African continent, or come crashing down in the subsequent century.

The Adowa story began long before the decisive battle, unfolding with the rise of three formidable Emperors in Ethiopia, each grappling to unite a fractured empire that once ruled the horn of Africa and beyond. The first of the three, Emperor Tewodros II, was an ambitious ruler seeking order over disorderly feudal lords, and had strengthened central authority and modernized his military to unite the divided regions under his rule. However, unrest brewed among those chafing under his iron fist, with the emperor succumbing under relentless rebellion, long before the invasion by the British empire that finally ended his rule.

Enter Kassa Mercha, the future Emperor Yohannes IV, a loyal subject to Emperor Tewodros II, who rose to leadership through cunning and battle prowess. As Tewodros' rivals multiplied, Kassa Mercha emerged as a peerless military strategist, systematically eliminating his rivals while contributing to the demise of Emperor Tewodros II with his support of the invading British empire. Although the British had left Ethiopia, new threats emerged from beyond its borders as Egyptian and other European nations eyed the land with covetous de-

signs, forcing Emperor Yohannes IV to confront all outsiders just like Emperor Tewodros before him.

With Emperor Yohannes IV falling defending the borders from a Sudanese invasion, the path seemed open for another to claim the throne — a prince from Shoa named Menelik, once held captive by Emperor Tewodros II will rise to emperorship. Menelik, guided by the lessons of his predecessors, outmaneuvered contenders through diplomacy and showmanship, inside and outside of his empire, until colonialism forced him into direct confrontation. On that fateful day in 1896, at Adowa, the vision of these three emperors for a unified, modern Ethiopia, resistant to colonial rule, faced the ultimate test with Emperor Menelik assembling over a hundred thousand united warriors from all regions of his empire against Italian colonial invasion.

"The Lions of Africa: The Illustrated Adowa series" explores the 19th century that shaped Ethiopia through these three rulers. The series is unabashedly a Pan-Africanist project intended to elevate African history and introduce African rulers and leaders to the upcoming generation by presenting them in a new light. However, Adowa doesn't seek to valorize African emperors or promote the pernicious ideology of exceptionalism of a single African nation in the Western sense. Instead, it delves into the triumphs and failures of past African regional politics through the Ethiopian nation and its celebrated rulers, in order to understand and examine the current fracture seen in the Ethiopian state and the African continent by extension.

The Adowa series aims to showcase the power of African unity, spanning ten illustrated books that lead to sagas culminating in a landmark moment of national unity. Illustrated with engravings, modified sketches, and fictional additions, the series features African characters in diverse societies, analyzing political, religious, and cultural structures rarely explored with such complexity in any previous work.

The Adowa series centers on the African experience before and after the continent's encounter with European colonizers.

Race relations form a major theme of the Adowa series, with authentic black history countering fictitious outsider perspectives on African history. Acknowledging these biases, the Adowa series strives to supplement past events with evidence from current-day discoveries and revisions by African writers, aiming to challenge ingrained racial and ethnic caste systems that dominate historical studies. Readers are encouraged to verify facts, as I have done by delving into historical records.

The beginning of the Adowa series, focused on Emperor Tewodros II and comprising three books, immerses readers in the narrative of Ethiopian unification under his rule. It explores the intricate dance of Emperor Tewodros II attempting to unify divided regions while engaging with the British Empire. Most importantly, a revision of his story gives us insight into the most powerful ideology invented by human kind — White supremacy and racism — and its operation on the African continent with European powers opening up the era of conquest with the scramble for the African land.

In a time when race-based populism and white supremacy sweep the globe, with African nations fueling regionalism, and the Western world grappling with a history of bigotry, the Adowa story which took on the divisive African regionalism and European fascist ideology, and obliterated them, aims to become a seismic cultural event to inspire the next generation of resistance fighters. The story of Adowa, capturing the unspoken zeitgeist movement of cultures resisting aggression, beckons the world to experience its greatness.

It's time for a new generation of Africans and the world that seeks to fight for equality and justice to learn about the epic tale of Adowa, one of the most important events in world history.



WORD GUIDE

IMPERIAL AND TRADITIONAL TERMS.

ROYAL TITLES

ASE: NEGUSA NEGEST: EMPEROR

NEGUS: KING

NEGESTE NEGESTATE: EMPRESS

ITEGE: EMPRESS (CONSORT)

ENDRESSE: REGENT/VICEROY

RAS: HEAD/DUKE

DEJAZMACH: GOVERNOR/GENERAL

FITAWRARI IMPERIAL: MINISTER OF DEFENSE.

AFE-NEGUS: MINISTER OF JUSTICE/MOUTH OF THE KING.

ORTHODOX/ISLAM RELIGIOUS TITLES

ABUNA: ALEXANDRIAN ELECTED PRIMATE OF THE ETHIOPIAN ORTHODOX CHURCH.

ETCHEGE: THE HEAD OF THE ETHIOPIAN ORTHODOX CHURCH, SECOND ONLY TO THE ABUNA IN POWER.

AQABE SA'AT: THE CLERGY HEAD ATTACHED TO THE ROYAL PALACE.

ABBA: PRIEST.

IMAM: MUSLIM LEADER

MESQID: MOSQUE

COMMON WORDS AND PHRASES

AWO: YES

ISHI: OKAY

EMMAYE: MOTHER

ABBAYE: FATHER

LIJE: MY SON/DAUGHTER

FERENJE: FOREIGNER

ANTE/AMTCHIE: YOU

TEWOBACHEH(SH): LEAVE IT, STOP KIDDING

ZEMBEL: SHUT YOUR MOUTH

CLOTH/GARMENT

GABI: THICK COTTON CLOTH

NETELA: A SCARF FOR WOMEN

SHIMMA: WARRIOR TOGA

KEMISE: DRESS/GOWN

SHASH: WOMEN HEAD WRAP

TIM-TIM: PRIEST/IMAM HEAD WRAP

FOOD/DRINKS

INJERA: FLAT BREAD

DORO WAT: SHICKEN PASTE.

ARAKE: SPIRIT ALCHOLIC

TEJ: HONEY WINE

TELLA: DARK BEER

KOSSO: MEDICINE PLANT

QWANTA: SUN-DRIED MEAT

BRILLA: GLASS

KOLO: ROASTED BARLEY

MISCELLANEOUS

MESOB: HIGH BASKET

AWAJ: PROCLAMATION

INDEE: EXPRESSION OF DISBELIEF

ALGA: BED/THRONE

MENMETTA: WHAT HAPPENED

DUNKWAN: A LARGE TENT

GIBIR: ROYAL FEAST

GURSHA: INTIMATE FOOD SHARING

FEATURED AUTHENTIC IMAGES



Young Kassa Hailu / Emperor Tewodros II



Ras Ali of Yeju and Egyptian Abuna Salama



**King Sahle Sellase of Shoa and Ras Wibe of
Semien/Tigray**

INTRODUCTION



They called him a visionary. A restorer of order and unity. A bloody tyrant. A nation builder and modernizer. A Mad-King. A Shifta. A tragic hero. Emperor Tewodros II has been many things to many people and the first three parts of the Adowa series examines his complex life from womb to tomb.

In a time of chaos and bloodshed, one man dared to unite a fractured kingdom and challenge the world's greatest powers. Deep in the rugged highlands of a mysterious land, locked away from the outside world, an indomitable figure was rising who would change the course of Ethiopian history forever.

Welcome to the era of Zemena Mesafent, a tumult that engulfed the Ethiopian kingdom in war, where brothers battle brothers and ruthless warlords carve the country into warring fiefdoms. For generations, Ethiopia has remained hidden from the world's eyes, its people preserving ancient traditions while anarchy tears the realm apart. In this upheaval, a Shifta warrior named Kassa Hailu emerged from the jungle with a vision that will make him one of the most formidable emperors in history.

Join us as we trace Kassa's incredible journey from childhood, boyhood, to adulthood. We will follow him into bloody battles and covert schemes, witnessing his transformation from fierce guerilla fighter to a ruler grasping for a crown as Kings of Kings of the empire. Along the way, we'll encounter unforgettable characters and glimpse a mysterious culture seldom seen by outsiders.

Kassa's rapid rise and radical ambitions will earn him powerful enemies—both within his kingdom and abroad. We will meet his contemporaries who had their own designs for the nation. To understand what drives this enigmatic leader, who was able to succeed despite all obstacles, we must venture into the heart of a man wrestling with destiny.

By the time you've finished this epic tale, you'll know Emperor Tewodros II as more than just a name in history books. You'll understand what compelled this charismatic and complicated king of Kings to risk everything for a unified Ethiopia. So sharpen your blade and prepare to enter a world of intrigue, adventure and empire-defining drama as we unveil the thrilling true story of one of Africa's most legendary figures whose legacy still echoes throughout the highlands.

Get ready to discover the man behind the legend. Let the journey begin!

PROLOGUE

The Lion Roars

The Cleverness of the Ferenje, the peace of our land they inquire about.

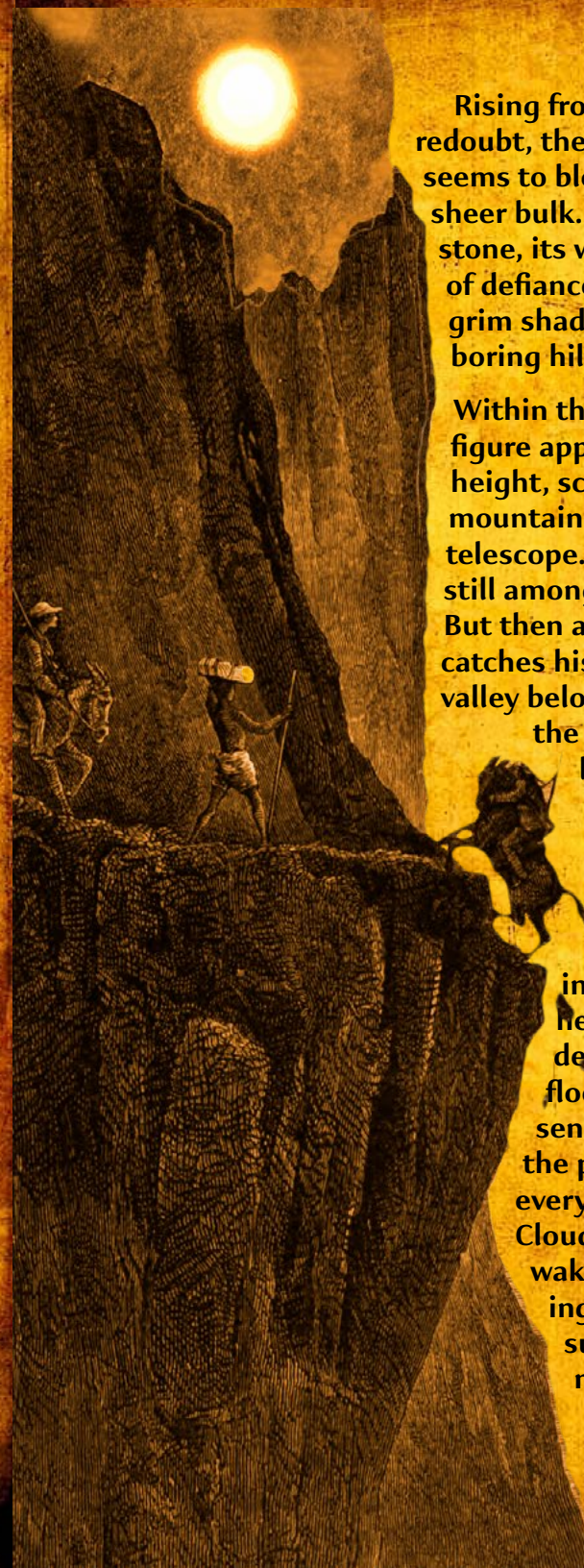
The rising sun throws its golden light on the picturesque mountain ranges, casting a vibrant glow over the weird and fantastic shapes that dot the landscape. Sunlight slices through the everlasting ascents and descents of the Ethiopian highlands, illuminating misty hills, deep ravines, and precipices that seem to stretch on endlessly.



Rising from its mountaintop redoubt, the fortress of Magdella seems to blot out the sky with its sheer bulk. Though weathered stone, its walls project an aura of defiance as they cast their grim shadow across the neighboring hills.

Within that shadow, a towering figure appears on the citadel's height, scanning the distant mountain slopes through a telescope. At first, all seems still among the rocky crags. But then a flicker of movement catches his eye, far down in the valley below. The figure adjusts the lenses for a closer look.

Slowly, a spectacular procession emerges from the shimmering heat haze. A great herd of elephants thunders along the valley floor, their massive feet sending tremors through the parched earth with every ponderous step. Clouds of dust rise in their wake, stirred by the quaking ground. Even from such a distance, the man can perceive the elephants' power and



majesty as they move as one massive, undulating beast.

He watches, fascinated, as the herd crosses from one mountainside to the other. Their passage shakes tiny pebbles loose from the crumbling valley ridges, sending them rattling down the slopes. Every footfall sends fresh shivers through the dusty soil.

As the elephants draw nearer, incredible details emerge. Their broad backs are laden with cannons and weapons, gleaming dully in the harsh sun. Behind comes a long line of camel trains, each beast straining under its cargo of infantry supplies. Their drivers—an international gathering of Africans and Arabs in Khaki uniform and head wraps—struggle to maintain order across the rough terrain.

But the largest contingent follows further back still. Even at this distance, the man can see it stretched to the horizon and beyond, snaking between the mountain passes. Row upon row of British soldiers march in precise formation, their



red uniforms blazing brightly against the drab landscape.

Intermingled are native troops from across the British Empire, along with cavalry units ranging further afield on horseback. The man rubs his eyes in disbelief. Never had he witnessed an army of this scale and complexity.

He swings his telescope. “You

must see this, Gabreye, such a force is surely meant for conquest, not diplomacy.” The figure hands the telescope to another man who takes the glasses silently, gazing out once more upon the sea of soldiers advancing ever closer.

An ancient roar that carries even over the din of armies on the move rises behind them. The figure turns to two lions, their roaring a declaration of defiance to quell the invading horde. The figure, his muscular body resolute, walks over to them, manhandles and rubs the manes of these majestic twin adult lions as if they are pets.

At fifty, this man, the Emperor of Ethiopia, cuts an imposing figure, powerfully built like a warrior with his face held high against the gale-force

winds, unfazed, he strides back to the cliff's edge, oblivious to the danger.

"What welcome will you offer these invaders at our gates Ase?" his companion remarks while handing back the telescope to the emperor who trains it on the advancing British forces in the far distance.

"If I were as powerful as I once was, I would certainly go down to the coast to meet them on landing," the emperor declares, lowering the telescope.

"Awo Ase, we would have picked them off, one by one," his companion's agreeable voice is carried off by the wind.

The emperor's gaze shifts to the flickering flames visible from the cliff edge. Bonfires burn around the fortress where his mortal enemies, the rebels of his kingdom, have gathered in the lower plains, smelling blood, poised to ambush his forces. The emperor raises his telescope and focuses on a tall woman in a regally decorated Kemise. . .

"The queen is here. . ." the emperor mutters referring to Queen Workquiteu of the Oromo clan. She appears to issue orders to her warriors, as if she can see him from far down below.

"So is the young one who now calls himself the prince of Shoa, Ase. . ." the companion adds to the surprise of the emperor ". . .there, on mount Falha" he points and the emperor trains his telescope on Negus Menelik, his escaped prisoner who has returned for revenge.

The emperor moves his telescope back on the advancing British forces and curses as he observes his own countrymen, led by Kassa Mercha of

Tigray, assisting the struggling army in navigating the treacherous mountains.

"If only I knew what I now know, I would have prepared them for our real enemy." The emperor sighs in regret. "A bite from a black snake has a cure, but a bite from a white one, you will search in vain until you die" the emperor laments.

"A black snake can bite you just as bad as a white snake, Ase" his companion counters ". . .but brothers who are enemies to their brothers are not snakes but like those fire ants in the undergarments. . ." the companion steps closer to the emperor, ". . .do you remember Ase, in Qwara?" he asks with sadness in his voice.

The emperor turns to him, this bear of a man in full war attire, Gabreye Wolde Mariam—his childhood friend and army commander has served him faithfully his entire life.

The emperor scans the horizon, surveying the empire he has forcibly reunited. He points west, towards their birth land. "There," he says sorrowfully. Gabreye places a comforting hand on his shoulder.

"Betraying men and upset stomach, I have never known you to bother Ase." Gabreye stands out with a unique lion's mane draped over his wide shoulders. In one hand, he holds a shield adorned with gold plating, while the other hand grasps a rifle.

"What are we to do with the kissing Judas whose mouth is honey, but their stomach holds bile?"



Gabreye asks, glancing back at a curious sight—a group of bedraggled and chained white prisoners under guard, shivering in the fierce wind in the distance.

The emperor grabs his pet lions' chains and yanks it as they pass the struggling guards and strides with them and arrives before the terrified prisoners. The hostages, European missionaries in tattered garments, fix their eyes to the ground. One, a stout bearded man, with heavy chains hanging on him, stares back defiantly.

The emperor steps to him, his lions grumbling as he hands the chain back to the guards.

"Gabreye, I thought all Ferenje were like our beloved John Bell, our Yohannes, who always told us the truth, who treated us with love and friendship..." The emperor glares at the defiant stout man peering at him "...who looked at us and our countrymen the way we looked at him, a true man of Christ who gave up his life for mine, but these—" he turns to Gabreye, lost for words to describe them.

"...wolves in sheep clothing, Ase, all liars who think they are our masterful God's on earth that have come to make way for the invaders!" Gabreye responds.

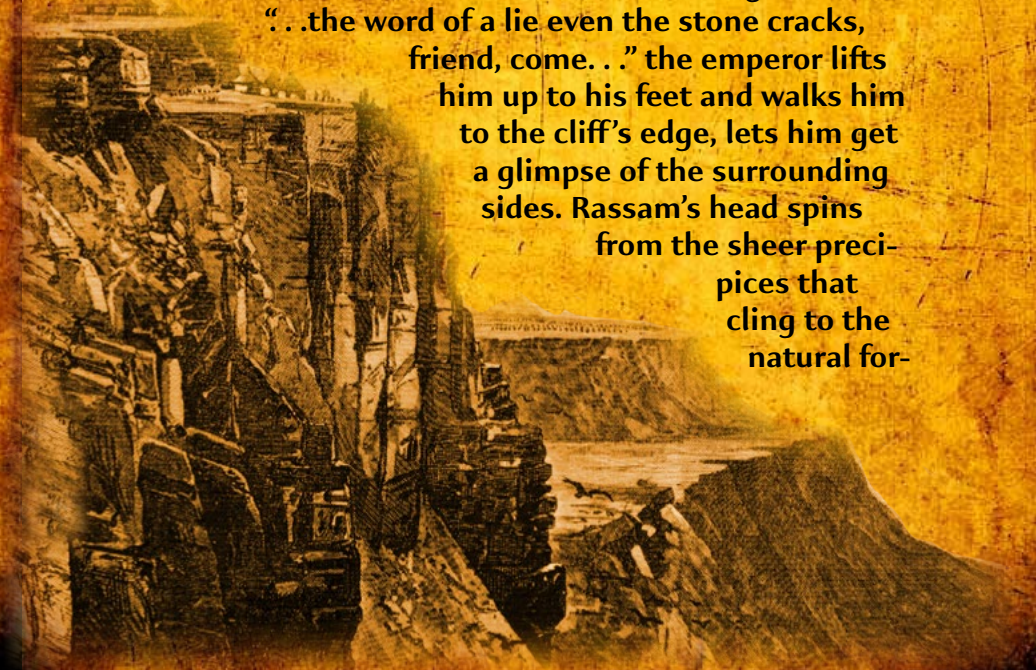
"Who insults a mother, huh?!" The emperor abruptly springs to life, and slugs the defiant man right on his mouth with a tremendous blow "Tell me, does not the Queen of England sell thread, needles, and tobacco to the world?" he shouts in fury "What of it if my poor mother sells Kosso?!" his guards chuckle watching the frightened man cower.

"They defame your grace with lies and rumors!" Gabreye grabs the chain on the defiant man, missionary Stern—a particularly hated prisoner who had insulted the emperor's mother with salacious writings—and yanks it hard, forcing him to bow down his head by force.

The emperor approaches a visibly anxious prisoner who stands separate from the others, watching Stern bleed. The prisoner quickly straightens up, making adjustments to his uniform, adorned with embroidery featuring golden oak leaves and a prominent red stripe that gleams across his chest.

"Even now, when my men beg me to hurl you all over the cliffs, have I not treated you as I would want you to treat me?" The emperor towers over the decorated, Hormuzd Rassam, the latest envoy diplomat, who falls down out of sheer terror.

"All I have received in return are more lies and insult..." The emperor, calming down, extends a hand and lifts the trembling Rassam, "...the word of a lie even the stone cracks, friend, come..." the emperor lifts him up to his feet and walks him to the cliff's edge, lets him get a glimpse of the surrounding sides. Rassam's head spins from the sheer precipices that cling to the natural for-



ness of Magdella that is perched thousands of feet high above the plain.



“I have lost all of my kingdom but this little rock. . .” The emperor quips, putting his arm around Rassam and stilling his nerves that are threatening to push him forward and cast him over the edge.

“Your Majesty, you can still negotiate, I can—”

“The die is cast friend, things must now take their course.” The emperor interrupts.

A sudden loud cheer erupts from the plains. The emperor trains his telescope on lower peaks, hundreds of warriors laboring to position an enormous mortar on a plateau have finally succeeded. The emperor’s eyes blaze with renewed vigor as he gazes through his telescope, proud and delighted to see the results. Tears form over his eyes as he reads the marking on the massive weapon that

dwarfs the other smaller cannons—a weapon he has toiled to build in his kingdom using these hostages, now bearing his royal seal as his last defence against invaders.

“God behind unknowing, the earth will not produce, God is great!” He whispers to himself then turns to Rassam “The lord knows what is in my heart, I built it to crush the wicked rebels in my kingdom and unite us because I knew what was to come for all of us,” his gaze returns to the British forces.

“I longed for the day I would see a disciplined, well-armed army in my kingdom. . .and here they have come!” The emperor casts aside his telescope and clutches Rassam’s shoulder, his eyes fixed on the advancing forces. He shoves Rassam back from the precipice and throws him down as fierce roaring rings out from his lions, a challenge to all who approach the fortress gates.

The emperor sweeps past the captive souls, mounts his majestic steed. Accompanied by Gabreye, who proudly carries the banner of the Or-



der of Solomon, and encircled by his loyal guards, they gallop amidst a formidable array of chieftains adorned with lion manes, shields, and gleaming swords. Along the path, thousands of the emperor's battle-forged warriors—the indomitable nucleus that has weathered the storms of triumph and adversity—prostrate themselves with reverence. Armed with spears and shields, the crack force pays homage to their sovereign as he rides forth in a spectacle of unparalleled grandeur.

The emperor swings astride his great stallion, eyes blazing as he surveys his legions.

“Are you ready to fight and die, or will you now abandon me like the others?” the emperor demands an answer. A vehement protest rises as fierce warriors stir, their chiefs responding as if orators on a grand stage insulted by the doubting emperor.

“We will never abandon you Ase!”

“We will rend the white ghosts to pieces!”

“Ase we will never leave your side!” they step forth, one after the other, vibrating with outrage.

Spurring to their fore, the emperor towers immense in his stirrups “God, who can do everything, and does it, has not allowed us to be shamed and lose our dignity like the others!” the emperor's voice rises.

“By God's power we will destroy them in battle and keep our dignity like we have for years before their arrival!” the emperor rallies.

“We know their deceit—the Turks, the Portuguese, the French—now these British missionaries

and their armies!” He spurs his horse. “Tell me! Do I look deceived like a Hindustani raja?”

A loud response of “No!” “Not our Ase!” “We are not fools!” erupts from his warriors.

“I know their game. When they want to conquer, first, the traders and the missionaries: then the ambassadors: then the cannon. It's better to go straight to the cannon!”

“Are you going to fight?!” A deafening response thunders as warriors leap and shout their response.

The emperor charges forth as guards release the lions. “Are you ready to fight these deceitful snakes and take back what we have lost?” The warriors erupt with blood-chilling cries.

“We will make our stand here on Magdella, Ase!” “We will fight and die!” “There is no cure for a bite from a white snake Ase!” they shout back reinvigorating their king.

The weary emperor suddenly looks twenty years younger—once again the brash, invincible warrior. The cheering rise to new heights. They have grasped victory from the jaws of ruin before and will again under their indomitable king.

“In Wollo, Tigray, Gojjam, and Shoa, you were victors!” the emperor declares “Thousands you have killed and thousands you have seen die and you have cast out your fears!”

“Men!” the emperor rides back to them and with a thundering voice “Give me your arms one last time, and I will give you the empire, I will give you Jerusalem!” His words hang in the air with an almost sacred weight as he made this solemn vow

before, and in response, a fervor ignites within his warriors. A primal energy surges through the ranks, and they erupt into a war dance, ready to execute the commands.

“Ase! Tewodros!” they chant. “Ase! Tewodros!” sunlight filters from the heavens and shines on the King of Kings, the elect of God, the Lion of Judah, Emperor Tewodros II of Ethiopia.

